

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM
TOM DAVIS, CHAIRMAN



NEWS RELEASE

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GRC OKs Free Mail for Military in Iraq and Afghanistan,
Stronger Whistleblower Protections, D.C. Property Transfer

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Government Reform Committee Chairman Tom Davis (R-VA) announced the Committee has approved several important pieces of legislation, including the establishment of a program to provide free postage on certain mail items sent to members of the armed forces serving overseas, the strengthening of protections for government whistleblowers and a proposals to authorize the exchange of certain land parcels between the federal government and the District of Columbia.

The bills are: H.R. 923, “Mailing Support to Troops Act of 2005;” H.R. 1317, “Federal Employee Protection of Disclosures Act;” and H.R. 3699, “Federal and District of Columbia Government Real Property Act of 2005.” H.R. 923 and H.R. 3669 passed by unanimous voice vote; H.R. 1317 was approved by a final vote of 34 to 1.

H.R. 1317, introduced by Rep. Todd Russell Platts (R-PA), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Government Management, Finance, and Accountability, enhances whistleblower protections for federal employees.

The legislation changes whistleblower law to include as a protected disclosure by a federal employee any lawful disclosure an employee or applicant reasonably believes is credible evidence of waste, abuse, or gross mismanagement, without restriction as to time, place, form, motive, context, or prior disclosure, and restore protection against retaliatory investigations. The Platts substitute amendment adopted in Committee would give jury trials to federal whistleblowers if the Office of Special Counsel does not take corrective action within 180 days on their retaliation complaints. Another amendment would add TSA baggage screeners to the list of covered employees. Finally, the legislation would also require GAO to study security clearances revocations taking effect after 1996 with respect to personnel who filed claims in connection with such security clearance revocations.

“This legislation reaffirms Congress’s commitment to protecting federal employees from retaliation for reporting on waste, mismanagement, criminal activity, and the like,” Davis said. “Federal employees must feel protected if they are willing to come forward and blow the whistle on improper actions. The bill makes clear Congress’s intent that ‘any’ whistle blowing disclosure truly means ‘any’ – no matter how, when, or where the report is made.”

Organizations supporting the bill include the Government Accountability Project, the Project on Government Oversight (POGO), Common Cause and 20 other good-government groups.

“If enacted into law, the Committee’s jury trial reform would be a landmark good government breakthrough when our country needs it most,” said Tom Devine, GAP’s legal director. “This action represents milestone progress toward a goal whistleblowers have sought for over two decades: the right to a day in court with their rights decided by the taxpayers they purport to defend.”

H.R. 923, introduced by Rep. Vito Fossella (R-N.Y.) and amended by the Committee, requires the Secretary to Defense to create a 1-year program under which members of the armed forces serving in Iraq or Afghanistan would receive a monthly voucher that can be redeemed to pay the postal expenses of sending one letter or parcel to the service members. The service member can then send these vouchers to anyone they choose, such as family members or loved ones.

“Even in this age of emails, instant messages, and video chats, nothing provides the morale boost to a soldier, sailor, airman or marine like regular packages or letters from home,” Davis said. “This legislation will ease the financial burden of keeping in touch for the families and loved ones of our fighting men and women.”

H.R. 3699, introduced by Chairman Davis, authorizes a land exchange between the federal government and the District of Columbia. Under the bill, federal properties in the District of Columbia that provide little value to the federal government or are an unnecessary maintenance burden would be transferred to the District, thereby freeing federal tax dollars to be spent in more productive areas. The bill, as amended, applies to 29 properties owned by the District of Columbia, the Interior Department’s National Parks Service or the General Services Administration. Several of these properties are already under administrative control of the District.

Transferring these properties would allow both Interior and the GSA to better manage their properties and to preserve and protect public lands for future generations. The District gains the ability to build neighborhoods, develop more parks, enhance economic revitalization, and increase the local tax base. The transferred property would allow the District to further develop the lands to increase the city’s tax base and decrease its financial dependence on the federal government.

“The District would gain control over properties that it can put to much better use than the federal government is currently doing, while transferring to the federal government properties that are better suited to federal control,” Chairman Davis said. “The District will be able to further develop the lands to increase the city’s tax base and decrease its financial dependence on the Federal government. This is a win for American taxpayers and it’s a win for D.C. residents.”

For more detailed information about the specific properties covered in the legislation, visit <http://www.nps.gov/ncro/dclandslegislation/>.

Also today, the Government Reform Committee approved the following bills, all by unanimous voice vote:

H.R. 3549, to designate the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 210 West 3rd Avenue in Warren, Pennsylvania, as the "William F. Clinger, Jr. Post Office Building.”

H.R. 3830, to designate the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 130 East Marion Avenue in Punta Gorda, Florida, as the “U.S. Cleveland Post Office Building.”

H.R. 3853, to designate the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 208 South Main Street in Parkdale, Arkansas, as the “Willie Vaughn Post Office.”

H. Res. 15, supporting the goals and ideals of National Campus Safety Awareness Month.

H. Res. 276, supporting the goals and ideals of Pancreatic Cancer Awareness Month.

H. Res. 389, supporting the goals and ideals of the Year of the Museum.

Please note: The Committee today did not consider H.R. 3134, “Federal Real Property Disposal Pilot Program and Management Improvement Act of 2005.”

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